

46 • LIFE IN THE BUSH

592 The matter of men traveling to distant camps for ceremonials illumi-
 595 nates again, and from a new angle, the great value of elderly widows in the
 587 household. Tu'untalumi, during his visit to Malau in August, was able to split
 his household efficiently by taking a couple of old wives with him to supervise
 his young wives on the journey and leaving other old wives at home in Tangio
 to begin storing up food for the grass-burning project which he intended to
 stage on his return. It will be noticed in the account of his movements that he
 began issuing invitations to the grass burning on his way home from Malau,
 [124] showing his confidence that the elderly wives he had left at home would
 251 have the preparations well in hand during his absence. A big man with a
 big household really needed three or four elderly widows because these en-
 abled him to split his work force in various ways as his various political and
 social obligations required and to be sure of trustworthy supervision of each
 of the segments. A man without widows in his household, or with only one,
 could not do this; in fact, it was hard for a man without widows to attend
 ceremonials at all, or even to receive a large party of visitors to his household.
 And, as we have already pointed out, since such a man would probably go
 hungry very often because he would not dare to send his unsupervised young
 wives into the bush to gather food, there were practically no such men nor
 such households. Widows were indispensable to a senior Tiwi, both in his
 public and in his private life.

Making Things

592 Throughout this chapter we have been stressing the contrast between
 887 the dull routine of life in an isolated Tiwi household during the greater part
 of the year and the sort of life typical on those relatively rare occasions when
 something special—a festival, a funeral, a fight, a grass burning, a naming
 ceremony, some collective phase of men's initiation—required the assembling
 together of several households for joint activity. Before leaving the daily life
 of the isolated camp, we should mention one other area of activity—namely,
 the manufacturing activities of the tribe. The Tiwi did not manufacture much,
 [127] but spears, throwing sticks, canoes, digging sticks, baskets, bodily ornaments,
 graveposts, and all the miscellaneous paraphernalia used in ceremonials had to
 be made in whatever leisure time people could find during the long weeks and
 months when each of the households lived more or less in isolation from the
 others. Crude and simple as these artifacts were, their construction required
 time, and only the older men had the time and the skill based on experience
 to make the more important of them.

• [147] Largely because of their failing eyesight, the older men hunted very
 little and hence tended to remain in camp all day while the young men were
 hunting and the women were gathering. There were, of course, some old men
 who took advantage of this time to do little except doze in the shade, but
 182 most of the household heads spent a fairly active day in camp engaged in
 511 making things. Here we find another aspect of Tiwi culture that results from
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628 of nondelivery of bestowed daughters, or other types of broken promises. Some of these cases had been going on for years, and settlement of them at the level of the individual duel had failed. The aggrieved individuals in the two Bathurst Island bands therefore pooled their grievances, persuaded many of their relatives and friends who were not aggrieved to join them, and a large party of men of all ages set off for the Mandiimbula territory.

[302] This party, comprising about thirty fighting men all heavily armed and all wearing the white paint indicative of anger and hostile intent, was a "war" party, and its coming to their territory was recognized as such by the Mandiimbula. On arrival at the place where the latter, duly warned of its approach, had gathered, the war party announced its presence. Both sides then exchanged a few insults and agreed to meet formally the next day in an open space where there was plenty of room. After a night mostly spent by both sides in individual visiting and renewing old acquaintances, the two armies met next morning in battle array, with the thirty Tiklauila-Rangwila warriors drawn up at one end of the clearing, and about sixty local warriors at the other end. Immediately the familiar patterns of the duel imposed themselves.

537 A senior individual on one side began a harangue directed at an individual
628 on the other. When he ran out of breath, another individual began his complaint. Since each accused Mandiimbula replied individually to the charges made against him, the whole proceeding remained at the level of mutual charges and replies between pairs of individuals. Angry old men on both sides often seemed to be trying to find a basis that would justify or provoke a general attack by one group upon the other, but always failed to find it because of the particularity of the charges. The rules of Tiwi procedure compelled the

[619] accuser to specify the sources of his charges and his anger, and these always turned out to be directed not at the Mandiimbula band, but at one, or at most two or three, individual members of that band. And when another old man took the center of attention, his anger would be directed at quite different individuals. Hence when spears began to be thrown, they were thrown by individuals at individuals for reasons based on individual disputes. Unlike the seduction duels, however, these duels occurred mostly between two senior men, and the danger of a direct hit was much reduced because of the poor marksmanship of both parties. On the other hand, the danger of somebody getting hurt was increased because a fight between two old men was likely to spread as other old men were drawn into it to support one or the other side—in which case, a wild melee occurred with badly thrown spears flying in all directions. This was probably a good thing, because soon somebody was bound to be hit, thus ending the fight. Not infrequently the person hit was some innocent noncombatant or one of the screaming old women who weaved through the fighting men, yelling obscenities at everybody, and whose reflexes for dodging spears were not as fast as those of the men.

628 [147]

As soon as somebody was wounded, even a seemingly irrelevant crone, fighting stopped immediately until the implications of this new incident could be assessed by both sides. For the crone was never really irrelevant; she was somebody's mother and somebody else's wife and somebody else's sister and

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Natives of Bathurst Island, North Australia.

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corroboree of the Melville Islanders, but it appears that he regarded the demonstration as hostile. He writes that "the dance consisted chiefly of the performers leaping two or three times successively out of the sea, and then violently moving their legs so as to agitate the water into a foam for some distance around them, all the time shouting loudly and laughing immoderately; then they would run through the water for eight or ten yards and perform again; and this was repeated over and over as long as the dance lasted." (114) 527 535

During none of these ceremonies, or indeed anywhere on the island, did I see anything of totemism in the scientific sense of the word. This fact is in accordance with my observations in Central and North Australia, and my negative evidence is amply borne out by the researches of Drs. W. E. Roth and H. Klatsch and others. (771) (114)

Pastimes.

The sham-fights of youths with small arrow-shaped spears have already been mentioned. Children were observed upon the beach competing in running and long jump. A favourite amusement of the younger folk on a breezy day is to collect the light globular seed-heads of the "spring rolling grass" (*Spinifex hirsutus*), that grow on every sand-hill near the coast, and take them to the beach and there release them on the hardened sand. Driven along by the wind, these seeds travel over the surface at no mean pace. Allowing them to gain a fair start, the children bolt after them and endeavour to overtake them and pick them up from the ground while dashing past them at full speed in "cow-boy" fashion. 524

Another game is that of hand-ball. The seeds of the zamia (*Cycas media*) take the place of a small ball. Two lads stand facing one another and hit the seed to and fro with the palms of their hands, after the style of a modern game of tennis.

Despite their keenness of sight and quickness of hand, they are, nevertheless, very backward in catching with their hands an object which is thrown at them. (147)

Burial Method.

The aborigines of Bathurst and Melville Islands have a unique and elaborate method of burial; graves have been found on both islands. It appears that the favourite places for burying the dead are there, where a jungle or mangrove-thicket breaks to the ordinary eucalypt-woodland, usually near to the sea-coast or to a native water. 764

Historically we have to note several observations in this connection.

Sir Gordon Bremer¹ mentions having discovered a grave on Bathurst Island in 1824. "The situation was one of such perfect retirement and repose that it

¹ *Imperial Parliamentary Paper*, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, London, March 27th, 1843; also in *The Genesis of Queensland*, by H. S. Russell, Sydney, 1888, p. 24.